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Wouter van der Brug and Claes H de Vreese (eds), (Un)intended Consequences of EU Parliamentary Elections, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016; xiii þ 296 pp.: ISBN 9780198757412, £55.00 (hbk)

Reviewed by: Sanja Badanjak

De Vreese and van der Brug's edited volume presents us with a collection of research pieces that examine the extent to which the intended consequences of instituting direct elections for the European Parliament (EP) have come to fruition. The 12 substantive chapters reveal a complex picture, with some of the intended consequences failing to materialize, and unintended ones, both positive and negative, appearing in their stead. The first direct elections to the EP (then the European Assembly) took place in 1979, with the stated aims of bringing the European project closer to European citizens and allowing for citizens' involvement in the decision-making process at Community level. However, Reif and Schmitt (1980) already noted in 1980 that voters think of EP elections as less important, with less at stake, and as contests in which the parties are still contesting domestic issues, suggesting that these elections are in fact second-order (national) elections, which lead to less interest from the parties and voters, lower turnout, fewer votes for the party forming the executive, and more votes for protest parties.

The picture painted by the second-order (national) elections framework certainly does not fit the intended aims of the institution of EP elections. The authors in this volume assess the consequences of EP elections in the light of the Reif and Schmitt framework, concluding that its overall conclusions stand, but with some adjustments to the mechanisms and processes that take place as EP elections become part of the European Union's (EU's) multilevel polity. The book looks into three areas where the consequences of EP elections can be seen: public debate and public involvement, party systems, and public support for European integration. The data analyses in these three areas are conducted using the European Elections Studies, concluding in 2009 and supplemented by other data sources, as appropriate and available.

In all three of the studied areas, the findings in terms of consequences are mixed. When it comes to the area of public debate, for example, Boomgaarden and de Vreese (Chapter 2) find that the news coverage of the EP is growing on average but that contestation in the media typically involves domestic actors rather than those at EU level. Additionally, when it comes to news coverage of the EP, they find that the gap between the countries with high and low coverage is increasing.

Perhaps the most important message to take from this edited volume is that there ought to be more research that considers its variables of interest as embedded in a multi-level polity, with relevance for the various levels of political contestation. The contribution by Franklin and Hobolt (Chapter 5) makes a particularly stark case in this regard, as they show that low turnout in EP elections spills over into national elections. If one's first experience of voting is in EP elections is of it ending with no discernible consequence for the EU's leadership, and even fewer visible consequences that one experiences directly, then one may be put off by it and not become a habitual voter. This is clearly an unintended negative

consequence of EP elections, one that also creates effects in the realm of national politics. Similarly, de Vries and Hobolt (Chapter 6) also find that EU issue voting is a feature of national elections, inextricably linking the two levels of contestation.

Apart from the unintended negative consequences for turnout and creating the habit of voting, the EP elections may also be acting to dampen the support for European integration; as Beaudonnet and Franklin (Chapter 10) show that there is a depression in the levels of support for integration that follows EP elections. Although this effect wears off over time, it is certainly neither intended nor positive. Additionally, Maier (Chapter 4) links knowledge-based support for the EU with a higher educational level, noting that there is information inequality in Europe.

Such interesting, relevant, and thought-provoking findings are numerous in this volume and cannot all be addressed here. This book is an excellent example of what edited volumes and collaborative projects ought to be like.

The editors have clearly managed to ensure consistency and focus throughout, and the research here is rich and substantively intriguing. The findings of the chapters are relevant for the practice of EU politics, as the editors conclude that the intended aims of direct EP elections can hardly be fulfilled without a reform that would provide visible effects of the elections, in the form of an executive that matches the EP majority.

Most importantly for scholarly interest, the authors are establishing a research agenda that will be informing the discipline's study of the EU as a multilevel polity for many years to come. As suggested throughout the volume, second-order elections are not necessarily harmless ones, and their consequences have the potential to affect more than the relationship of voters with the institutions of the EU.

Although this volume's contribution is significant, there are some shortcomings that ought to be addressed by subsequent research projects. No single book project is able to cover all the relevant ground and there are two issues that have been somewhat neglected in this particular case. First, more linkage with theory building in the study of the EU as

a multilevel polity would be welcome, particularly as some key concepts, such as those of party systems or salience, remain underspecified. Second, problems of identity are likely to be driving much of the attitudes toward the EU and, as a corollary, toward the EP and the EP elections. However, these have not seen much discussion in this book and would be a worthwhile addition to any follow-up project, either as control variables or as a focus of interest.

Finally, the book's publication and preparation took place as the most recent round of European Elections Study data was being published. Repeating and extending the studies from this volume using the data from the 2014 EP elections would be a worthwhile endeavour, as it would provide a further test of the hypotheses and validation of the results presented.

Reference

Reif K and Schmitt H (1980) Nine second-order national elections: a conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results. *European Journal of Political Research* 8: 3–44.